

**Remarks by Philadelphia City Commissioners' Chairwoman Lisa Deeley to the
Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration
June 22, 2022 2:30PM**

Good afternoon, Chairman Butterfield, Ranking Member Steil, and members of the subcommittee on Elections, I am Commissioner Lisa Deeley, Chairwoman of the Philadelphia City Commissioners, the three-member bipartisan board responsible for voter registration and elections in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I am pleased to provide this testimony and I have submitted my full written remarks for the record.

First, I would like to point out that in the current term of Congress, the overwhelming majority of the members were on the ballot in November 2020. So when some of your colleagues choose to spread lies about that election, saying that it was a stolen or that there was fraud, please make sure to remind them that it was their election too. It is remarkable that elected officials never seem willing to cast doubt on their own victory when transmitting lies about another's loss.

I am glad this Congress is holding hearings to examine the serious problem of mis and disinformation. In Philadelphia, our elections have been under attack by false claims for some time now. The result has been the lowering of the public's trust and discouraging them from participating in the electoral process. There is no doubt that you are familiar with some of the more famous instances of misinformation to come out of the City of Brotherly Love.

There was the 2008 instance where two members of the New Black Panthers Party were videotaped standing outside of a polling place that serves a heavily African American precinct. That video was given to Mike Roman, who was at the time a Republican Ward Leader who ran a website dedicated to "fraud, cheating, dirty tricks, absurdity, and other election news", you are probably more familiar with him as the Trump staffer from Pennsylvania who has been subpoenaed by the January 6th Committee. The video went viral. The resulting political fallout played out down here in Washington, it held up confirmation hearings, and was used to attack the Obama Justice Department. This video, of an isolated incident, has been held up as the "Holy Grail" for those who think that elections are stolen or that there is widespread fraud in large, majority-minority, Democratic cities such as Philadelphia.

This was carried over into the 2012 Election, when Mitt Romney did not receive a single vote against Barack Obama in 59 precincts in Philadelphia. These precincts were located in extremely heavy African American neighborhoods in North and West Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Inquirer sent reporters out to locate the and interview the few registered Republicans in these precincts. The ones they did talk to either said they did not know they were registered Republican or that they voted for Obama. No evidence of fraud or intimidation was found. Regardless, of the truth, that did not stop many from spinning what was essentially an expression of voter preference into evidence of fraud. Up until 2020, the "59 precincts claim" was the most often repeated conspiracy about our elections and something that seemed to come up every November.

Things really started to get bad when in 2016, then candidate, Donald Trump became obsessed with Philadelphia, and not in a good way. He became fixated on the idea that he needed to flood the city with poll watchers to prevent the election from being stolen from him.

In the lead up to the 2016 election, Trump told a rally in Altoona, PA “We're gonna watch Pennsylvania. Go down to *certain areas* and watch and study and make sure other people don't come in and vote five times. ... The only way we can lose, in my opinion -- and I really mean this, Pennsylvania -- is if cheating goes on.”

As you listen to those words you can see the seeds that were planted in 2016 with his followers laid the groundwork for the election misinformation on a mammoth scale which we saw in 2020 and culminated in the insurrection that happened here on January 6, 2021.

Being in the middle of the mis and disinformation around the 2020 Election is really the most surreal experience that has ever happened to me. I would sit there inside the Pennsylvania Convention Center, where the counting of the mail ballots took place, looking at what was actually going on but then reading and seeing all this incorrect information being disseminated about what was happening. It was like reading about an alternative dimension. I would read that we had barred watchers, locked out watchers, and even “roughed up watchers” but then I would look up and see them all, both Democrat, Republican, and even a few from the Green Party, sitting in a semi-circle talking to each other as votes were being counted in front of them.

Probably the most ridiculous story of the entire 2020 election was published by the Buffalo Chronicle. To sum up the story. Democratic operatives who were working in the department apparently provided crates of quote unquote “raw ballots”, to a Philadelphia mobster. From there, according to the anonymous source, they were taken to South Philly and in 60 hours 300,000 ballots were marked for Joe Biden using, an oddly specific detail, of a sharpie. They were then packaged into non-descript cardboard boxes and dropped off outside the Pennsylvania Convention Center. For this the mob was supposedly paid \$3 million. But here is the kicker, the mobster was reportedly ready to flip on Joe Biden and provide primetime Congressional testimony in exchange for a pardon from Donald Trump because of the book and movie deals and because “He wants a clean record. He wants to fish and hunt on federal lands. He’d really like a job with the National Parks Service. You need a clean record to get those things,” quoted another anonymous confidant.

It was so out there and was from a publication that nobody had ever heard of that originally, my staff and I, thought it was a joke story when it showed up in the clips, like something that the Onion would publish. It was not until we started to get calls from established media outlets and fact checking organizations that we realized that it was not a joke.

The story was tweeted by the son of one of Trump’s lawyers, which turned into its own story. Later, Rudy Giuliani mentioned it on Fox Business calling it “an allegation” but even he had to add that was “far fetched”.

It turns out the Buffalo Chronicle is a known disinformation site run by Matthew Ricchiazzi, a self-described “pro-Trump” political consultant in western New York. The site had previously been investigated by the Toronto Star and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for false stories relating to the 2019 Election in Canada. The CDC sent a reporter to the address listed as their headquarters in Buffalo, NY and, almost stereotypically, it was an abandoned building.

During the count, Trump's Pennsylvania Political Director, who was working for Mike Roman, the same Mike Roman who I would remind you was later subpoenaed by the January 6th Committee, followed me out of the Convention Center shoving a camera in my face and accusing me of keeping the Trump campaign out of the count. The video was posted on Twitter, Rumble, Parler, and other social media sites. The comments on that video ranged from mean comments about my weight, to comments that I should be in jail, to comments that escalated to threats of violence against me. One literally just wrote the word "rope" over and over again. At least one of these threats raised a red flag with law enforcement. I was told that I would be receiving two police officers who would follow me around everywhere, even inside the Convention Center where we were supposed to be safe, even when I went to the bathroom, one of them had to escort me. This was not optional, when I say I was told, there was no option, I was told by the police that this would be happening. That same week, two men were arrested outside the Convention Center, who drove from Virginia with lock picking tools, ammo, and guns, including an AR-15, the mass murder's weapon of choice.

Due to security concerns, myself, my fellow Commissioners, and some of our staff moved into a hotel attached to the Convention Center for our safety. Unfortunately, our families were not with us. I sent my mother out of the state. Commissioner Schmidt had to send his family out of the area after threats with his children's names were texted to his wife. Even our staff was not immune from having threats made against them. As chair, my office was responsible for requesting and coordinating the police protection for my colleagues and staff. At one point all three of the elected commissioners or their families were under some level of police protection. It was around this time that a screen shot from the "Contact Us" page on our website showing the office room numbers for the individual commissioners was menacingly posted as a response to one comment. Those office numbers were removed, and they have not returned because of this reason. That is how bad it got. We spent over a half million dollars on security that election, there is a police annex inside the Convention Center, but things were so crazy that was not enough, and I had to call in the Sheriff, who handles the security for the courts in Philadelphia. She showed up with an additional 40 Sheriff's deputies to secure the area.

Security remains a big legacy for us since the 2020 Election. We have since moved out of the temporary location at the Convention Center to our permanent ballot processing center. The city is spending millions of dollars to upgrade the facility, adding fencing, bullet proof glass, and metal detectors. Before 2020, in the history of Philadelphia elections, we have never hired private security. Since 2020, we have not held an election without them. We expect to pay \$500,000 for private security in the upcoming fiscal year. Before 2020, we were much more open and accessible to the public. Anyone could wonder into our area of city hall and ask for directions. Now we ask that the doors remain locked, and that people call to be let in out for concern for our and our staff's safety.

The thing that made the mis and disinformation that we saw in 2020 so dangerous was how the President of the United States, his campaign, his legal team, and questionable "media" would work off of one another, feeding a spiral of mistrust among the American people where we see even years later many do not know what is true and what is not. These efforts began before

Election Day 2020. In the summer, after our Primary and as the President continued to attack voting by mail, the Trump campaign sued Pennsylvania over the use of drop boxes, its filings parroting the claims by their client. Gnarring headlines, spreading false claims, and generating new claims from the depths of the internet, and actors impersonating as news reporters on so called news networks that just competed with one another to see who could be the most outlandish in order to gain more viewers from Trump's followers. They lost that lawsuit too.

When we opened our satellite election offices, the Trump campaign purposely sent operatives, such as their political director, to the offices to video themselves getting kicked out. These videos were then edited and posted online to accuse us of doing something nefarious. This is known as a false flag operation. In fact, after he was removed from City Hall, the political director put his camera away and asked if he could go back in to vote, he was allowed to do so. That night Trump declared "Bad things happen in Philadelphia" during a Presidential debate seen by tens of millions of people. My phone started blowing up. This was followed up by a lawsuit regarding watchers' access which stated, "Bad things are happening in Philadelphia". They lost that lawsuit. But the use of these lawsuits to reinforce and give validation to the misinformation only helped cement the lies into people's minds. They trust the law and if it is in a lawsuit then it must be true. This continued and got worse after the election with lawsuits parroting the claims about observers' access, trying to throw out all the mail ballots in the State of Pennsylvania, the so called "Kraken" lawsuits. Rudy Giuliani was even on TV talking about how many lawsuits they had as proof that they were going to reverse the election results. But they lost them all, some of the lawyers lost their ability to practice, some were sanctioned, but too many have not been punished for their role in all of it and continue to practice. Some are now currently working on races in 2022.

Before, I wrap up I just would like to acknowledge that mis and disinformation is not exclusively something of the right and Donald Trump. In fact, we had to deal with plenty of false information being spread by those on the left, including Jill Stein in 2019, about our new voting system in Philadelphia. We spend a significant amount of time debunking false and misleading claims, and defeating legal challenges she raised. As a country, we all need to make sure that we are getting information from trusted sources. People posting and sharing videos on Facebook and Twitter, even those who title themselves as experts, may not be the best place to gather your facts.

I would like to conclude my testimony by speaking to those watching today who still believe the misinformation from the 2020 election, by trying to put you in my shoes and tell you how it has been from my perspective. Imagine you are a farmer who grows corn and you have grown it for years. Then you start reading on social media about the Truffula fruit that you are growing. You think "who could possibly believe that?" as you look out your window and see your workers harvesting your corn and not a fictional fruit from a Dr. Seuss book. Then the President of the United States starts talking about your Truffula fruit, people come to your farm, see your corn but allege that you are hiding your Truffula tree. People threaten your life and the lives of some of your fellow farmers. The police have to come and follow you around as if you are the president or something. Even after the corn harvest is done, people are still talking about the

Truffula fruit, even those who bought your corn and are satisfied. People, still to this day, including your high school friends and classmates, post Truffula fruit comments on EVERY SINGLE one of your Facebook posts. Even your friends will not mention it in front of you but by their comments you know they think that you did grow a crop of Truffula fruit. Now two years later you are invited to testify before Congress, you who could not financially afford to finish college and was working at ACME before working your way up state and city government to become a corn farmer, but what do they want you to testify about? Why people think you grew Truffula fruit. Oh joy, the topic that just will not go away. Well just like there is no Truffula fruit, there was no fraud, there was no steal. I and my fellow election professionals are human beings who take pride in running free and fair elections. Sometimes people lose elections because they get fewer votes.

Thank you and I am happy to answer questions if you have them.

Attachments